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1 February 1971

# MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Probable Impact on Communist Capabilities and Intentions of Not Attempting an Ashau Type Operation

1. The course of events in 1970, particularly developments in or related to Cambodia, had the net effect of creating a different ball game to which Hanoi's strategic and logistic planners have had to adjust. The expanded theater of conflict has changed pre-1970 calculations with respect to force needs and requirements. The loss of the sanctuary areas which Cambodia had provided in earlier years posed a new set of strategic problems. Prior to 18 March 1970, much of Hanoi's battlefield strategy was built around the concept of having Cambodian sanctuaries available in close proximity to major populated areas in South Vietnam and Hanoi's force requirement calculations could assume that easy access to such sanctuaries provided a sure fire device for limiting casualty rates. None of these planning assumptions are now valid. The changed political climate in Cambodia also closed the logistic pipeline through Sihanoukville and Hanoi's planners must prudently assume that neither the US nor the South Vietnamese are likely to allow this pipeline to reopen as a reliable, safe route for the movement of large quantities of military supplies. Furthermore, the fighting in Cambodia, especially the allied operations of last summer and ARVN incursions since then, has caused large quantities of stock-piled Communist supplies to be lost through capture or destroyed and occasioned considerable disruption of the Communists' forward distribution system.

2. In sum, 1970's events have faced Hanoi with the urgent task of expanding its overland logistic support route through Laos and making it capable of carrying virtually the total burden of supporting Communist forces in Cambodia and South Vietnam. Given the unavoidable constraints on major activity imposed by the Indochina monsoonal climate, Hanoi must complete its essential route expansions and improvements and move the bulk of this year's supplies southward before the rains begin in late April or early May -- or else slip its timetable and planning preparations by almost one calendar year.

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1- [redacted] (Ashau)  
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1- Memo To & From Dci

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3. It is within the above context of "givens" that one must frame any assessment of the probable impact on Hanoi's capabilities and intentions of trying -- or not trying -- an Ashau-type operation. If no such operation is mounted, the primary restraint on Hanoi's logistic capabilities in Laos will perforce be air interdiction (largely US) and light ground harassment by friendly guerrillas, operating in fairly small units on what would have to be basically hit and run raids. Such aerial interdiction augmented by some ground harassment would be bothersome but would probably not be sufficient, of itself, to prevent Hanoi from executing the bulk of its planned logistic activity in Laos during the current dry season. Over the past years, the Communists have consistently demonstrated an impressive ability to effect quick repairs and adjustments adequate to offset the disruptive effect of short term interdiction efforts.

4. Thus, in the absence of large-scale and sustained ground operations, we would expect the enemy's logistic campaign in Laos to succeed in moving record amounts of supplies through the Laotian Panhandle during this dry season. It is hard to estimate the throughput volume with precision but our best judgment is that it could be at least 15-20% above last year's level and, given the right set of circumstances, could be on the order of, or 50% greater than, the throughput achieved last year.

5. The immediate implications of such an increased flow in terms of the enemy's offensive capabilities are limited. As indicated above, a higher throughput is imperative in order to compensate for the loss of the Sihanoukville route, to replace the depletion of supplies in South Vietnam and Cambodia, and to provide adequate logistic support for a substantially broadened theater of operations. Moreover, the enemy has experienced a number of delays in mounting this season's logistic offensive. All of these factors support a judgment that even a substantial increase in the flow of supplies will not be adequate to support a resurgence of major offensive capabilities this year of the Tet-1968 variety. It might be adequate, however, to provide the logistic muscle for significant high-points or localized offensives in such areas as MR I, the central highlands or MR II, or parts of Cambodia. "

6. The most significant effects of a successful logistics offensive this dry season will be felt over the longer term. Communist success during the next few months in rebuilding stockpiles and restoring the

viability of Hanoi's logistic system would mean that the stage had been set, in logistic terms at least, for Hanoi to be in an optimum position to achieve major offensive capabilities very early in the next dry season (October 1971-April 1972).

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